

# First nations origin stories, and thoughts on indigeneity, evolution, and religion – Dr. Joe Watkins, Ph. D

This video was recorded at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History on May 22, 2016

Dr. Joe Watkins: 00:17 In the beginning, a group of people walked out of a hole in a mound. They lay around the mound in the sun until they got dry, having been made of clay. Once they were dry, they walked down the mound, walked to the river, crossed the river, built the fire on the other side. The next morning, when they got up, they saw the sun. They walked in the direction of the sun, eventually settling in an area now known as Georgia. They became the Creek. Another group of people came out of the mound, they too lay on the side of the mound until they were dry. They followed the trail that the first group made, they came to the river, saw the fires still smoking on the other side of the river, they crossed the river, could not pick up the trail from there, walked a little bit to the North and to the East. Those people became the Cherokee. (01:20) A third group of people came out of the mound lay around on the side until they were dry, walked to the river, saw the smoldering fires left by the two previous groups crossed the river, decided that that looked like a nice place to stay. Didn't move on any further. Those people became the Chickasaw. The final and best group of course came out of the mound lay on the sides of the mound until they were dry. They stood up, looked around them and saw that they were in the most perfect place. They stayed in the area of that mound, vowed to protect that the mound itself is named Nanih Waiya. It is the heart and the Homeland of the Choctaw nation. (02:13) As that story illustrates, tribal groups in North America more fully established relationships. Relationships with place, relationships with nature and relationships with each other. I am Choctaw. I am Choctaw by blood. I am an American Indian by choice, and I am native American by legislation if you will. Being an Indian becomes more and more complex daily and evolution perhaps plays more of a peripheral role in that complexity. American Indian groups if you recognize probably are members of every established religious group within the world with few minor exceptions perhaps.

(03:15) American Indians, or perhaps native Americans is more of a political designation than a religious or perhaps even social one. With more than 550 distinct separate tribes in North America alone or in the United States alone, it would be nearly impossible to try to discuss or establish any single native American perspective on religion, let alone the impact of evolution on religion. Being American Indian becomes more and more complex and evolution and the idea and concept of human origins is grows I should say perhaps more and more politically important as that complexity grows. (04:08) Science suggests that Homo sapiens came to this continent 20, 25 perhaps at the most 50,000 years ago, but we as American Indians have always been here. Science can be used to establish that we too are immigrants to this continent, and when one adds politics to that mix, we start actually stirring the complexity of which I speak. We may not have evolved physiologically within this area, not as separate species, but our origins are here. It is the intersection of science, politics and human origins that have extremely broad social impacts on American Indians and indeed on indigenous populations worldwide especially in this ever-growing political climate. Thank you.

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